

The Macy Movement

***IACY** - The Movement in Macy probably began last June. Every weekday morning a stream of elementary school children would surge out of the town's dingy, warped old school house and converge on John Mangan's apartment in the teachers' quarters.

Mangan had already been with Macy's Teacher Corps contingent for two years, so he knew how to handle himself among the running, tumbling Omaha Indian children.

His Teacher Corps duties had been completed, and he had his masters degree in elementary education from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He was 25 now, and it looked like the Teacher Corps had been a good way to get out of the draft, as he had hoped it would be.

HE COULD GO back to New York any time now. All the other student teachers had left. But he was sticking around for summer school, putting up with bored, restless children for 16 hours a day, taking them swimming or to the movies, feeding them, answering endless questions about mandolins and the "Umpire State Building," teaching them and starting the Movement.

There is nothing to do on the reservation on hot summer days. If you're a small child you run around and get dirty. If you're 12 or so you run around with the same friends every day. If you have a bike ride it hard, a little harder every day. If you have a horse you ride him a little harder every day, and sometimes you hurt him. You throw rocks at dogs and windows. Sometimes you get caught sniffing glue.

IF YOU'RE A teenager you hang around. You listen to the juke box at Olafson's store until the store closes at 6 p.m. After that there is nothing open in Macy. You can't get a hamburger or a coke. Once or twice a week there's an old movie at the Community Center, but you've seen the

Jim Thorpe story too many times already. And the kids are always running around you and screaming. And the whole town is dusty and dirty. At the infrequent dances you don't dance much, and the tribal policemen shine flashlights on you to make sure you aren't drinking or doing something naughty.

You get drunk whenever you can. There's a lot of marijuana growing around town, and some of it is okay. Whenever you are in a car you drive very fast, as fast as you can, and sometimes you try to hurt yourself.

But on weekday mornings in Mangan's apartment last summer the fourth and fifth grade children would crowd into a stuffy little closet. Mangan would stuff an old sheet into the crack under the door and the closet would be completely dark until Mangan turned on the amber light. Mangan would work over a strange machine in the corner. A bright light would shine for a few seconds, then Mangan would give the children a sheet of heavy paper.

THEY WOULD DIP the paper into a pan of strange-smelling chemicals, and would see a hazy outline appear in the amber light. The outline would grow darker and stronger, and before they knew it they would be gazing in wonder at a picture they had taken in class that morning - a picture of a smiling, blurred face, or of a desk, or of a classroom ceiling. And the Movement had begun.

In September the scene shifted to the old galvanized quonset church across the street from the school. It used to be Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church. There is a cross on top and a schedule of services on a sign outside.

But today no church organ gently sanctifies the building with peaceful strains of the "Hail Mary." Instead an electric organ pounds out "Proud Mary" accompanied by



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electric guitars and a set of drums. The beat is strong and the voices of the fifth grade musicians fill the rest of the converted church, where some children are air-cleaning a car engine, some sand down wooden boomerangs they made themselves, and some paint the plywood partitions between Mangan's music room and Gary Kruec's workshop.

KRUEC AND HOWARD Pine are recent NU Teachers College graduates working in Macy for the first time this year. Kruec set up the auto and woodworking shop. "At least it's not mass confusion anymore," he says with some pride now. "It's sort of organized confusion."

Mangan set up the rock music part of the shop, and in another room is installing a darkroom that will eventually keep the traffic out of his closet.

He teaches fourth grade in the school and directs three bands in the shop. He's "proud of those damn musicians."

The whole program is called "pre-vocational training". That means doing something instead of sitting around in a classroom. The fifth through eighth grade students work in the shop now. The younger children want to, but the facilities can't handle them yet.

THE SHOP IS open five

days a week, for an hour and a half on Tuesday and Thursday, three and a half hours on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The teachers don't give any grades for shop work. "Kids get what they make or do in shop," according to Mangan, "not letter grades."

And homework is no problem in this course, Mangan says. "They keep coming by on weekends and asking if they can practice. They're always up for shop."

The whole idea of the shops is to make school creative for the children so they won't drop out the way they do now. But

EVEN INSIDE the regular classroom Mangan isn't overly awed by the prescribed Nebraska grade school curriculum. "Nobody around here expects to be able to follow it," he says. "I've never even looked at it."

"I have 14 kids and about six different levels in my class. What's important is how much they understand, not how much of the book we cover."

Macy school also started an ungraded primary system in what would normally be grades one through three this year. Children transfer back and forth from room to room according to their proficiency in the

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the workshop is not even a year old, and the teachers can only hope it's working. "It's harder to handle the other kids, even in shop," Mangan admits.

On the whole though, the response from the children is reassuring to Mangan. "The kids think it's fun, but they don't treat it as goof-off time."

particular subject being taught. "We're getting into a lot of team-teaching, aides, and small-group work this year," Mangan explains.

THE SCHOOL has also started an Omaha Indian language class for the young Indians this year. Larry Evers, an NU graduate student working in Macy this year, helped organize the program. The children are tutored in their native language by John Turner, an Omaha who speaks the tongue fluently.

The Movement is still growing in Macy. It's not too well defined, and nobody's too sure what its results will be. And some of the older teachers don't believe in movement under these conditions.

But one fact emerges crystal clear from the whirlpool of fluctuating philosophies and rapid changes of the Movement in Macy: the children are coming to school more regularly.

And John Mangan will be back again next year. He may have seen his last of the New York suburbs. "These kids are real," he says with conviction. "They're the same in school as they are out of it. They aren't goody-goody phonies like you find in white middle-class schools."

Story and
photos by
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Winded student . . . pauses in fourth grade P.E. class.